

March 1, 2023

Written Testimony in Support of SB-4, An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Alix Rachman, and I am a Master of Public Health candidate at the Yale School of Public Health working with the Tenant Energy Advocacy Project. Over the past year, I have engaged in tenants' energy issues in New Haven and spoken directly with New Haven tenants who have trusted our research team with their stories and lived experience.

I am testifying in support of a rent cap and in support of SB-4, with changes to better protect tenants.

Environmentally safe, stable, and equitable housing is a basic human need. [Connecticut has one of the highest energy costs in the nation](#) with a majority of residents paying [11.8% of their income on energy](#), which is 4% higher than the national average. Energy efficiency upgrades have been introduced as an effective method to sustain thermal comfort, lower utility costs, and protect human health. There are federally-funded programs that allow renters to install these upgrades in their homes, but they experience low uptake among highly burdened communities for a [number of reasons](#). Some include the high cost of remediation of health and safety barriers, the split-incentive issue where tenants are responsible for utility bills and their landlords have no motivation to invest in energy efficiency, and lack of tenant bandwidth. As such, low-income households pay up to [14% of their income on energy bills](#), resulting in the sacrifice of basic necessities and dangerous coping mechanisms, such as limiting showers, forgoing their heaters during the winter, or using an oven to warm the home, to avoid disconnections and threats of eviction. **No human being should have to live like this.**

The state is in dire need of affordable housing options for residents. Approximately 52% of Connecticut renters are cost-burdened--tenants are spending more than 30% of their gross monthly income on rent alone, which falls disproportionately on Black and Indigenous individuals, other people of color (BIPOC), disabled people, and the elderly. Wages in the state have not sustainably kept up with median rent prices and have increased by 20% within the last two years. Implementing a yearly rent cap and removing no-fault evictions will address the affordable housing crisis in Connecticut by ensuring stable housing to BIPOC and low-income tenants and ensure that their basic needs are met. This bill will address the energy crisis by increasing the economic stability and leverage tenants require to pursue energy efficiency upgrades in their homes, ultimately improving overall health and wellbeing and preventing predatory landlords from displacing tenants due to such upgrades. Finally, the funding granted by SB-4 will address the required remediation of health and safety issues, such as mold and asbestos, that prevent tenants from installing energy efficiency upgrades and exacerbate human health.

I am in strong support of rent caps in Connecticut, with the following revisions:

- **SB-4** should set rent caps closer to 2.5% to 3%, as this lower rate would be more affordable and predictable to tenants.
- **SB-4** should cover each rental unit between tenants to ensure that landlords cannot evict tenants in order to increase rent. When thinking about energy efficiency upgrades and programs, this is crucial to increasing uptake to protect tenants against displacement.
- **SB-4** should expand to include good cause eviction protections to cover ALL tenants, instead of just elderly and disabled people.

I urge members of the committee to vote in support of this bill with suggested revisions. This bill has the potential to save lives. **It's time to prioritize people over profit.** Thank you for your consideration.

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